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DISPATCH

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Newspaper Credibility

In the words of CIA Director George Bush, the use of journalists for foreign intelligence operations has met with "considerable quiet understanding" by a "number of members of the Fourth Estate."

Mr. Bush didn't consult us. Nor would we expect him to venture opinions from the newsmen of little America.

Had he approached us we would have told him we do not believe a newsman should ever have an surreptitious alliance with any element of government.

The one thing any newspaper worthy of the name must have going for itself is credibility.

Reporters and editors must make their own decisions about news. If they are ever in a position where their news judgment can be affected by secret agreements with powerful agencies of government, their credibility can be destroyed.

If people don't believe in a newspaper, they won't buy it for fear the information they're getting is tainted.

The Founding Fathers developed the constitutional concept of freedom of the press not because they believed newspapers were the repositories of eternal wisdom, but because they knew somebody, some institution had to stand as a watchdog over government.

Someone had to be in a position to present unvarnished information to the people to use in making judgments about public affairs.

How can a watchdog perform if on a government leash?

We don't believe it can.